Trinity III

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Preacher: Fr. Wade Miller

[0:00] I think one of the hardest things for all of us to do is to have some sort of self-reflection, to take inventory of our lives.

We are naturally defensive people. When we feel attacked, our first response is to give people a piece of our mind or to get even with them.
When we hear comments that we consider uncouth or out of line, we automatically assume the worst about others. When we see things that are contrary to our faith, we become indignant and begin drawing the line in the sand, us versus them.
And there is a time to be outraged, especially when people are promoting ideas and practices that endanger the lives of others.
But here in our gospel text, we are confronted with a different response. A response of love and mercy. Here in our gospel reading of Luke chapter 15, Jesus is being criticized by others.
[1:14] Why? Well, we read, Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Jesus to hear him, and the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, This man receives sinners and eats with them.

In Luke's gospel, table fellowship or having a meal with someone had great significance. It meant more than just grabbing a bite with someone.
It was an action of endearment and friendship. Therefore, our Lord was making friends with the most scandalous of people.
Now, that does not mean that he condoned their sinful behavior. It does mean that he saw them as human beings created in his own image.
He saw them as those who needed a home. And that home was with him. When we spend time reading and reflecting on the words and the deeds of Jesus, especially as we're reading the gospels, we are given a depiction of mercy that transcends the noise and the violent eruptions that we see every day in our lives.
[2:30] It should comfort the parents who worries about the future of their children. It should comfort those whose bodies ache from pain and suffering, wondering what the future holds.

It should comfort all of us who stay awake at night, worrying about what the next day is going to bring. Jesus tells a parable that demonstrates his mercy and his love for the sinner.
He speaks of a man who has a hundred sheep, but one goes missing. If this happened to us, we would hope that this one helpless sheep would not be harmed.
But the most responsible action, as we would calculate in our minds, would be to stay back and to protect the 99. But that is not the story that our Lord tells.
He says that the man goes out seeking that one lost sheep. And when he finds that wayward sheep, he hoists the creature on his shoulders.
[3:40] And he carries that sheep home. He celebrates because the sheep has been found. The same is true of the other story here in our gospel reading.

A woman loses a silver coin. She does not say, well, it'll eventually show up. No, she lights a lamp. She sweeps the house and she searches diligently until she finds it. And when she finds that one lost coin, she rejoices telling her friends and neighbors.
So our Lord concludes these two stories by saying, likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.
Jesus received sinners. Jesus received sinners. He ate with them because he loved them. Just as he loves each and every one of you.
[4:45] He desires to feast with you. He desires that you find your place, not in the chaotic and the anxious world in which we live.

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No, he desires that you find your place with him. You see, we are that lost sheep in the story of Luke chapter 15.
We are that lost coin. And Jesus is the one who came to seek and to save the lost. He came for you.
He calls you to come and to feast with him and upon him as he gives you a place at his table in his kingdom. Earlier in Luke's gospel, we read the following words in Luke chapter 5, verses 31 and 32.
Jesus answered and said to them, those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.
[5:55] That word repentance is key. Repentance means that we are no longer casting condemnation on everyone else. It means we come to Jesus as people who acknowledge our sin.

And who seek to be changed by the great physician who imparts life from death. Who gives hope.
We come to Jesus acknowledging our faults and admit that we are this lost sheep and we are that lost coin.
And the extraordinary happens as we turn our hearts to God. The God who made all things is the God who calls us to find our refuge and our comfort with him at his table.
He feeds us so that we might rejoice and tell others of his goodness and grace. And that is to be our goal.
As we navigate living in a desperate world that is lost. We are to be people who repent. Turn away from our sin and turn to Christ.
[7:06] We are to be people who rejoice in his grace and in his mercy. And we are to be people who then proclaim the mercy of God rather than hitting the panic button or becoming defensive or lashing out at others in anger.

Friends, the love of Jesus is much greater, much deeper than you and I can ever, ever imagine.
And that love is what sustains us throughout our lives.
That love and that mercy gives us true joy and comfort that is our hope eternal. Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.

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